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A POEM

ON

THE TIMES OF EDWARD II,

FROM A

MS. PRESERVED IN THE LIBRARY

OF

ST. PETER'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

EDITED BY THE

REV. C. HARDWICK, M.A.,

FELLOW OF ST. CATHARINE'S HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE PERCY SOCIETY,

BY RICHARDS, 100, ST. MARTIN'S LANE.

No. LXXXII. MAY 1849.

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PREFACE.

THIS curious relic of our earlier poetry is preserved at the end of a folio volume of Homilies, by Radulphus Acton, or Achedon, who flourished, according to Pits, about the year 1320. (*De Scriptoribus*, s. 474.) The volume was presented to St. Peter's College, Cambridge, by Thomas Beaufort, half-brother to King Henry IV, and afterwards Duke of Exeter; the use of it being reserved (as we gather from a note at the commencement) to one Mr. John Savage, "ad terminum vitæ suæ duntaxat." The donor was appointed Lord Chancellor of England in the year 1410, and died in the year 1425 (*Lord Campbell's Lives*, i. p. 316); by which dates we can approximate with sufficient accuracy to the time when the manuscript reached its present resting-place.

The hand-writing of the *Poem* belongs to the same period as that of the *Homilies*, and is possibly

the work of the same scribe. It may be assigned to the reign of Edward III, or perhaps of Edward II. This opinion, however, as to the execution of the manuscript, is quite independent of the age of the *Poem;* and since nothing has survived respecting the author, his date can only be ascertained by the internal evidence of language and historical intimations.

With respect to the language of the Poem, it will be found (speaking generally) to resemble the old English of *Piers Ploughman's Creed and Vision*, so that we shall not far misdate its composition, if on a prima facie view we consider it *not later* than 1350. On the contrary, it will appear to be still more ancient. For, first, it contains allusion to certain calamities very prevalent in England at the time of its publication. Thus in stanza 1:

> Why werre and wrake in londe
> And manslaugt is y-come:
> Why honger and derthe on erthe
> The pour hath ouer-nome;
> Wy bestes beth i-storve
> And why corne is so dere,
> ȝe that wyl abyde,
> Lystyn and ȝe mow here.

And similarly in stanza 78; both which passages furnish proof that the country was then, or had been very recently, suffering from war, famine,

and a grievous murrain; and that the price of corn was immoderately high. Now these various historical phases will, I think, be found to synchronize with that portion of the reign of Edward II, which is included between the years 1311-1320. The allusion to war and domestic divisions may be dismissed, by referring to the troubles connected with Piers Gaveston, and the unsuccessful expedition to Scotland. The other topics, which are of a less ordinary character, will be illustrated by the following extract from Stow's *Chronicle*:*

"The king, in a Parliament at London, gave the rod and office of marshall vnto Thomas of Brotherton, Earle of Norfolke, his brother. Hee also reuoked the provisions† before made for selling of victuals, and permitted all men to make the best of that they had; neuerthelesse the dearth increased through the aboundance of raine that fell in harvest, so that a quarter of wheate, or of salt was solde before mid-sommer for thirty shillings, and after forty shillings. There followed [A.D. 1316] this famine a grievous mortality of

* Pp. 217, 218, Lond. 1632.

† These are probably the dietary provisions published in *Leland's Collectanea*, vi, 36, ed. Hearne. The date is 1315. A second visitation of the same kind is placed by Walsingham in the year 1319. Scotland and Ireland were equally afflicted. See *Carte*, ii, 337, 340.

people, so that the quick might unneath bury the dead. The beasts and cattall also, by the corrupt grasse whereof they fed, dyed, whereby it came to passe that the eating of flesh was suspected of all men; for flesh of beastes not corrupted was hard to finde. Horse-flesh was counted great delicates; the poor stole fatte dogges to eate. Some (as it was sayd), compelled through famine, in hidden places, did eate the flesh of their own children, and some stole others which they deuoured. Theeues that were in prisons did pluck in peeces those that were newly brought amongst them, and greedily devoured them, halfe aliue. A gallon of small ale was at twopence, of the better threepence, and the best fourpence."

Another allusion, of a character more specific, will place our Poem about the same period, *i.e.*, between 1311 and 1320. In stanza 35, the following lecture is read to the order of the Hospitalers:—

An other religion ther is
Of the Hospital;
They ben lords and sires
In contrey over al:
Ther is non of hem all
That ne awt to ben a-drad,
Whan thei bethenken
How the Templars have i-sped
For pride:

Forsothe catel cometh and goth
As wederis don in lyde.*

It will be observed that the poet is here moralizing on the suppression of the Knights Templars, and the transferring of their property to the Hospitalers. These changes had been effected at the council of Vienne, in the year 1311; so that a warning like the above, addressed to persons somewhat flushed by their recent good fortune, would be, on our hypothesis, both natural and pointed.

A further corroboration will be found in stanza 58, which refers to a general military conscription:

Whan the kyng into his werre
Wol haue stronge men,
Of ech toun to help hym at his werre
Fourten or ten:
The strong schul sytte a-doun
For x. shylynge other twelue
And send wreches to the kyng
That mow not help hem selue.

I believe no example of levying forces after this fashion has been recorded before the year 1316, nor have I met with any repetition of it for some time afterwards. In that year, however, we are told, "the great men, and knights of shires, granted the king one able-bodied footman, well

* *I.e.*, "property comes and goes as clouds do in March."

armed, out of every village, or hamlet, in the kingdom. Market-towns were to furnish more, in proportion to their bigness and ability to defray the expense of sending them to the general rendezvous, and of paying each man a groat a day for sixty days; upon the expiration of which term their wages were to be paid by the king, who declared, by his letters patent, that this should not be made a precedent, nor be drawn into a custom."*

From these, and other incidental allusions, which it is not necessary to particularize, the poem before us may be fairly assigned to somewhere about the year 1320. It would thus precede *Piers Ploughman* by an interval of more than thirty years, and was (if I mistake not) one of the very earliest *satirical* poems composed in the English language.

It is well-known that this species of warfare had been long practised by our forefathers through the medium of the *Latin* language; and that many who on this side the channel imitated the gentler branches of Provençal poetry were not backward in copying its more caustic productions. In neither case, however, was the satire of a popular character; for besides the comparative obscurity of the language, it was nearly always disguised in

* Carte, ii, 339.

tropes and allegories. The exceptions, which are few, consisted of short English ballads, directed against some obnoxious individual, and differing in that respect from the poem before us, which is a broadside against whole orders. Indeed (as Warton* observes) the personalities of some of the above-mentioned ballads seem to have occasioned a statute against libels in 1275, entitled "Against slanderous reports, or tales to cause discord betwixt king and people". Probably, through dread of this statute, as well as of ecclesiastical censure, the allegorical species of satire is revived by the author of *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, who moreover substituted the alliterative style of the Anglo-Saxon period for the rhyme now beginning to be almost universal. Diverse from him in both these respects is the author of the poem before us. His versification† is in rhyme, with occasional examples of alliteration; neither does he confine his censures to any mere abstractions, such as pride, avarice, and simony,

* Vol. i, 45; ed. 1840.

† In the manuscript the stanzas appear in five long lines, each line divided by the metrical dot, or dash. The first four lines, by subdivision, produce eight lines, which rhyme in alternate pairs. At the end of the fourth long line is added a versicle, generally of two syllables, which (oddly enough) rhymes with the final syllable of the last line.

but proceeds to a direct attack on all states and conditions of men,—the pope, archbishops and bishops, archdeacons, parsons, priests, abbots, priors, monks, canons, friars (white, black, and grey), hospitalers, deans and chapters, physicians, knights, barons, squires, ministers of state, judges, sheriffs, advocates, attorneys, merchants, and in short, every body.* The tone of our author, though here and there pathetic, must be described as, on the whole, deeply lugubrious, and his matter, with only a few exceptions, one volley of unmitigated invective. All classes of society, he is persuaded, find their chief pleasure in victimizing the poor; and although we do not read that he stirred up any violent demonstration, I cannot help thinking that poems like his had great force in predisposing the populace for the Lollard doctrines, as well as in urging them to Jack Cade excesses.

Still it would be most unfair to argue as if the grievances of the people in that age were either few or trivial. The whole course of the reign of

* There is one exception to this sweeping condemnation, in the absence of all allusion to the pardoner, who in *Piers Ploughman* and in *Chaucer* is handled very roughly. I consider this silence a further proof of the early date of the poem. Indulgences were not sold, at least publicly, till A.D. 1313, so that we could scarcely expect to hear of their abuse so early as 1320.

Edward II was one of domestic deterioration and of external disgrace; the king, weak and capricious; the courtiers, lawless, unprincipled, and oppressive. Among the bishops and secular clergy there were too few of those

> . . . Lele libbynge men
> That Goddes lawe techen:

while, in very many cases, the licentiousness of the monastic and mendicant orders kept pace with their pride and rapacity. These latter were widespread evils, and had been gradually provoking a spirit of satire not only in England,* but in almost every corner of western Christendom.†

Again, we have abundant proof that when our poet was uttering his complaint in behalf of the poor and starving, the wealthier classes of the nation were revelling in ease and luxury. A curious picture of these habits is preserved in a dietary, or royal edict, bearing date 1315, and occasioned, most probably, by the famine to which we have before alluded. While all who had the means were faring sumptuously every day, the rest were literally abandoned to destitution, and hundreds, we know, shared the fate of the diseased

* See the *Latin Poems* attributed to Walter Mapes, and *Piers Ploughman, passim.*

† See a collection of kindred poems, *De corrupto Ecclesiæ Statu*, Basil. 1556, edited by Flacius Illyricus.

cattle, to which they were deemed hardly superior.

The last particular, which may be adduced in extenuation of our author's acrimony, has reference to the alleged corruption of the law-courts of that period. The lord chancellor was Robert de Baldock, who stands charged as one of the principal agents in bringing on the troubles of Edward II. "He seems," says Lord Campbell,* "to have been a very profligate man, and to have been unscrupulous in perverting the rules of justice, regardless of public opinion, and reckless as to the consequences." He was afterwards seized by the mob, and thrown into Newgate, where he died of his wounds.

On the whole, therefore, we must admit that there were numerous handles for satire; and if the specimen before us appears somewhat coarse and indiscriminate, it was probably the only kind of corrective which that age could have appreciated.

C. H.

St. Catharine's Hall, Cambridge,
18*th April*, 1849.

P.S. I should remark (what was unknown to me when I transcribed this poem) that an *imperfect* copy of it has been printed in Mr. Wright's *Collection of Political Songs*, from a manuscript

* See *Lives of the Chancellors*, i, 199.

in the Advocates' Library at Edinburgh. The printed Poem agrees in the main with this one, not however without important variations of words, and even of lines and stanzas. From one or two circumstances I suspect that the Edinburgh manuscript was a sort of second edition corrected. Mr. Wright simply describes the fragment as very curious, and assigns it to the reign of Edward II. I regret that he was unacquainted with the Peter-House MS., for besides supplying many various readings, it would have enabled him to complete his text, and would thus have enhanced the value of his interesting publication.

A POEM

ON THE

TIMES OF EDWARD II.

1. Why werre and wrake in londe
And manslaugt is y-come,
Why honger and derthe on erthe
The pour hath over-nome;*
Wy bestes beth i-storve†
And why corne is so dere,
ȝe that wyl abyde,
Lystyn and ȝe mow here,
With skyl;
Certes without lesyng,
Herken hit ho so wyl.

2. In hevene y-blessyd mut he be
That herkeneth here a stounde;‡

* Overtaken.

† Dead; perished. (A. S.) See examples in *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 803.

‡ A moment, or short time. (A. S.) See numerous examples in *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 814. This stanza is not in the Edinburgh MS.

How plenteth and al myrthe,
For pride is brout to grounde;
How stedfastnesse and trewthe
Yt* turned to trecherye,
And all poure mennes sing,
"Alas! for hunger I dye
Up ryȝt:"
Y-hered† be the kyng of heven,
Such is hys myȝt!

3. God greteth al the peple wel,
And doth hem to understonde,
That ther nys‡ but falsnes
And trecherye in londe.
At the court of Rome,
That trewth schuld begynne,
Hym is forbode the paleys;
He dar not com ther-ynne
For dowte:
Thow the pope clepe§ hym,
ȝet he schal stond ther-oute.

4. Alle the popes clerkes
Have i-take to red,‖
Gif trewth com among hem,
I-wys he schal be ded:
Ther ne dare he noȝt com
For doute to be slayn

* Ys?
† Glorified.
‡ Is nought.
§ Invite.
‖ Have taken counsel.

Withyn the popes paleys,
ȝif he miȝt be sayn :*
For ferde
ȝif symonye may mete hym,
He wil smyte of his hede.†

5. Voys of clerk shal lytyl be herd
At the court of Rome,
Were he never so gode a clerk,
Without selver and‡ he come :
Thoȝ he were the holyest man,
That ever ȝet was i-bore,
But§ he bryng gold or sylver,
Al hys while is for-lore‖
And his thowȝt :
Allas ! whi love thei that so mych
That schal turne to nowgt?

6. So another ther aȝen
That is an horlyng¶ and a shrewe,
Let hym com to the court
Hys nedes for to shewe,
And bryng gold and selver
And non other wedde,*

* Seen. † Berde? ‡ If.
§ Unless. ‖ All his time is lost.
¶ An adulterer. (A. S.)
"And wende bi heom that is wiif,
And hire *horeling* it were."
MS. ap. *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 459.
* Pledge. (A. S.)

Be he never so mych a shrewe,
Heys nedes schul be sped,
Ful styll;
Covetyse and symonye
Have all the world at wylle.

7. Erchebisshopes and byshopes,
That schuld trewly enquere
Of al men of holy cherche
In what stat thei were,
Some be foles hemself
And ledeth a feble lyf;
Therfor dar thei now3t speke,
Lest ther ryse a stryf
Of clerkes;
Lest ych on bewrye other
Of her feble werkes.

8. Certes [holy cherche*]
Is mych i-browt a-doun,
Syth [seynt Thomas] of Cantrebury
Was smyt of the crown.
[He was byshop] of ry3t
To governe holy cherche,
These other be many lewed
And feblech do the wyrche:
I-wys
That is i-sene in holy chyrch,
Hyt fareth al amys.

* See note ad fin.

9. Every man hymself
May ther-of take ȝeme,*
No man may serve
Twey lordes to qweme :†
Thei beth in offys with the kyng
And gadereth gold an hepe,
And the state of holy cherch
Thei lat go lygge to slepe
Ful stylle :
Al to many ther ben of such
Nerer‡ Goddes wylle.

10. The erchedeknes that beth sworn
To visite holy cherche,
Anon thei welle begynne
Febleche‖ to wyrche.
Thei wolleth take mede
Of on and of other,
And lete the personn have a wyf
And his prest another
At wille :
Covetyse schal stoppen here mowth,
And make hem ful stille.

11. Whan an old personn hys ded
And his lyf agon,
Than schal the patrone
Have ȝiftes anon :

* Notice; care.
† Please. (A. S.)
‡ Were it not. (A. S.)
§ Feebly.

Than wolle the ȝong clerk
Bygynne for to wowe,*
The patroun schal have ȝiftes
And presentes ynowe,
And the byschoppe:
Ther schal symonye wel sone
Be take by the toppe.†

12. Covetyse upon hys hors
Wolle sone be ther,
And brynge the bischop silver
And rown in hys ȝhere ;‡
Alle the pour clerk
For nowt thei schul wyrche,
He that most bryngeth
He shal have the chyrch
I-wys:
Thus the stat of holy chirch
Is gyed§ al amys.

13. Whan the ȝong persoun
Is stedyd‖ in hys cherch,
Anon he wolle bygynne
Feblych to wyrch.
Ne schal the corn in hys berne
Be ete with no mows,

* Woo, or supplicate.

† Be taken by the head, a very common old proverbial phrase.

‡ Whisper in his ear. The phrase occurs in Shakespeare's Sonnets. § Ruled. ‖ Stationed.

Hit schal be spended sykyrly
In a ful sory use,
If he may:
Hit schal be alle i-throsshen*
Ar† Christymasse day.

14. Wan he hath gadred to-geder
Markys and powndes,
He pricket‡ out on hys contré
With haukes and houndes
Into a strange contré,
And halt a wenche in cracche.§
A! wel is her that first may
Such a personn cacche
In londe.
Thus thei serveth the chapels,
And leteth the chyrch stonde.

15. He nymeth‖ all that he may
And maketh the cherch pour,
And leteth¶ ther behynde hym
A thef and an hore,
A servand and a deye*
That ledeth a sory lyf:

* Thrashed. † Ere; before. ‡ Rode.

§ A crib, stall, or manger. Mr. Halliwell explains it, "a rack of any kind, a manger." ‖ Taketh. ¶ Leaveth.

* A female servant who had the charge of the dairy, and all things pertaining to it. Chaucer has the word. Sometimes a male servant who performed those duties was so called.—*Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 301.

As homlych* the gon to bedde
As god-man and hys wyf,
With sorow,
Ne schal ther pour man have ther gode
At heve† ne at morow.

16. Wan he hath that sylver
Of wolle and eke of lomb,
He putteth in hys pawtener‡
A kerchyf and a comb,
A shewer,§ and a coyf
To bynd with hys loks,
And ratyl on the rowbyble‖
And in non other boks
Ne moo;
Mawgrey¶ have the bysshop
That lat hyt so goo.

17. Thei the bysshop hyt wyte
And hit bename cowthe,*
With a lytyl selver
He may stop his mowth;

* Homely. † Evening.

‡ Purse, or bag. See several examples in *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 609.

§ Mirror. The Edinburgh MS., edited by Mr. Wright, reads *myrour*.

‖ A small ribibe, or kind of fiddle. See *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 682, in V. *Ribible*. Mr. Wright erroneously prints it as two words. ¶ Misfortune. (A. N.) * Became public.

He medeth* the clerkes
And sustyneth the wench,
And lat the parysch far amys:
The devyl hem a-drenche†
For hys werkys!
Sory may the fader be
That ever mad hem clerkys.

18. ȝif the person have a prest
That is of clene lyf,
And a gode shryft-fader‡
To maydyn and to wyf,
Than schal an other putte hym out
For a lytyl lasse,§
That can not a ferthing worth,
And nowȝt wel hys masse
But ille.
Thus schul the persons shep
For defaute spylle.‖

19. Certes also hyt fareth
By a prest that is lewed¶
As by a jay in a cage,
That hymself hath beshrewed:*
Gode Englysh he speketh
But he not† never what.
No more wot a lewed prest

* Bribes. † Drown. ‡ Confessor. § Less.
‖ Be destroyed. ¶ Unlearned. * Cursed. † Knows not.

Hys gospel wat he rat*
By day;
Than is a lewed prest
No better than a jay.

Eche man may wel wyte,
By the gode rode!†
Ther bethe many prestes,
But not alle gode.
That maketh gode men ofte
To be in mych blame,
For these nyse‡ prestes
That playeth her nyse game
By nyȝt;
Thei goth with swerd and bokler
As thei wolde fiȝt.

Abbots and priours
Doth aȝenst the ryȝtis,
Thei rydeth with hauks and hounds
And contrefetith knyȝts;
Thei schuld by-leve§ such pride
And be relygious,
And now is pryde lord and syre
In eche house
I-wys:
Religion is nowȝt i-loked,‖
Hit fareth al amys.

* Reads. † Cross. ‡ Wanton.
§ Leave. ‖ Regarded. (A. S.)

22. By that ilke* deth
That I schal on dye,
Ther nys† no relygion,
That ther nys yn ennye.
Pryde and envie
Have tempreth‡ so here gle,
That among men of religion
Is non unyté
I-take:
Forsothe love and charité
Is turned to woo and wrake.

23. Late come to an abbey
Syx men other seven,
And lat ther on aske gode
For Godd love of heven,
He schal stond theroute
An-hungred and a-cold;
Schal no man do hys nede
Nother ȝong ner old
For hys love,
That is kyng over all kyng,
And setteth us al above.

24. Bot lat a boye com fro a lord,
And bryng hym a letter,
And do hys erand to the porter,
And he schal spede the better:

* Same. † Is not. ‡ Mingled; adulterated.

ȝif he is with any man
That may do the abbot harme,
He schal be led into the halle
And be maked warme
Abowt mawe,*
And a Goddes man shal stond ther-owt ;
Sory was that lawe.

25. Thus is God Almyȝty dryve
Out of relygion,
He ne mot noȝt among hem come
In felde ne in ton ;
His men beth unwelcome
Both erlych and late,
The porter hath comaundement
To hold hem without the ȝate,
In the fen :
How myȝt thei love wel the Lord,
That faryth so with hys men !

26. Mych sorow thei† suffre
For our Lordes love ;
Thei wereth sokkes in her schon‡
And felted botys above ;
Wel thei beth i-fed
With gode flesch and fysch,
And if it ys gode mete

* Stomach.

† *I.e.*, the monks.

‡ Their shoes.

The lete* lytyl in her disch
Of the beste:
Thus thei pyneth her bodyes
To hold Crystes hest!

27. Religion was i-maked
Penance for to drye,†
Now it is mych i-turned
To pryde and glotonye.
Wer schalt thu fynde
Redder men on lerys‡
Fayrer men other fatter
Than monkes, chanouns, other freres
In toun?
Forsothe ther nys non aysier lyf
Than is religion.

28. Religion wot every day
Redely what he schal don:
He ne careth no skynnes thing§
But for his mete at non.
For clothes ne for hows hyre
He ne careth nowt,
But whan he cometh to the mete
He maketh his wombe towt‖
Of the beste:
And therafter he wol fonde¶
For to cache hys reste.

* They leave. † Bear; undergo. ‡ In complexion.
§ Not the least. ‖ Stomach full. ¶ Seek.

29. Hafter mete the haf* a pyne
That greveth hem ful sore:
He wil drawe at a draw3t
A gode quart other more
Of gode ale and strong
Wel i-browen† of the beste,
And sone therafter he wol fond
For to cach reste,
3if he may.
Thus thei pyneth her bodyes
Bothe ny3t and day!

30. Now beth ther other relygious,
Menours and Jacobyn,
Carmes,‡ and other freres
I-found of seynt Austyn,
That wol preche more
For a buschel of whete
Than brynge a sowle fro helle
Out of grete hete
In rest.
Thus is covetyse lord
Est and eke west.

31. Lete me come to a frer,
And aske hym shryft,
And come thu to another
And bryng hym a 3ift,

* They have. † Brewed.
‡ Carmelite friars. See *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 232.

Thou shalt into the fraytrye*
And be made glad,
And I schal stond without
As a man that wer mad
In sorowe,
And ȝet schal myn erynd be undo
For to† hyt be on the morow.

32. ȝif a ryche man be seke
And evel hym hath nome,
Than wol the frere
Al day theder come.
ȝif hit is a pore man
And lyth in myche care,
Mych mysawntre‡ on that on
That wol com thar
Ful loth:
Now mow ȝe wel here
How the game goth.

33. ȝif the rych man deyth,
That was of grete myȝt,
Than wol the freres al day
For the cors fiȝt.
Hyt is not al for the calf
That the cow loweth,
But it is for the gode gras
That in the mede groweth,
By my hod!

* Refectory. † Until. ‡ Misadventure.

And that may eche man know
That can any god.

34. So ych mut broke* myn hed
Under myn hatte,
The frer wol do dirige
If the cors be fatte:
Be the fayth ic schal to God,
If the cors be lene,
He walketh abowt the cloystre
And halt his fet clene
In hows:
How mowe thei forsake
That thei ne be covetows.

35. An other religion ther is
Of the Hospital,
They ben lords and sires
In contrey over al;
Ther is non of hem all
That ne awt to ben a-drad
Whan thei bethenken
How the Templers have i-sped
For pride:
Forsothe catel† cometh and goth
As wederis‡ don in lyde.§

* As sure as I wear?
† Property.
‡ Clouds.
§ March.

36. Official and denys
That chapitres schuld holde,
The schuld chaste men fro syne
And thei make hem bolde.
Make a present to the official
Ther* thu thenkest to dwelle,
Thu schalt have leve a twelf-moneth
To serve the devel of hell
To qweme.
Forsoth, have thei the selvre,
Of synne take thei no ȝeme.

37. ȝif a man have a wyf
And he love her nowt,
Bryng hyr to the constery†
Ther trewth schuld be wrowt,
Bring twei fals wytnes with hym
And hymself the thrydde,
And he schal be deperted,‡
As fair as he wold bydde,
From his wyf:
He schal be mayntend full wel
To lede a sory lyf.

38. Whan he is deperted
From hys trew spowse,
Take his neyȝtbores wyf
And bryng her to howse,

* Where. † Consistory. (A. N.) ‡ Divorced.

ȝif he have selver
Among the clerks to sende,
He may have hir to hys wyf
To hys lifs ende
With onskyll :*
Thei that so fair with falsenes dele,†
Gods cors on her bill.‡

39. ȝut ther is another craft
That towcheth to clergye,—
That beth thes fisisiens§
That helpeth men to dye.
He wol wag his uryn
In a vessel of glass,
And swer by seynt Ion
That he is seker than he was,
And seye
"Dame, for defawȝt
The god-man is i-sleye."

40. Thus he wol affray
All that ben therinne,
And mak many lesyngs
Sylver for to wynne:
After that he wol begynne
To confort that wyf,

* Wrongfully; with unskill. † Separate.

‡ *Bill* of divorcement? or rather, *mouth* and *face*; cf. stanza 43, "Gods cors on hys cheke," and stanza 69, "Fals in the *bille*."

§ See note [d].

And sey, "Dame, ley cost,*
And we schul save his lyf"—
And lye,
Thow he be never the wyser
Whether he wol lyve or dye.

41. Furst he wol begynne
To blere the wyfs eyȝe ;†
He wol aske half a pownd
To bygge with spiserye :‡
The eyȝt shillyngs schul up
To wyn and to ale,
And bryng hem rotys and rynds
Bretful§ a male‖
Of nowȝt :
Hit schal be dere i-now a leke¶
Wan it is al i-browt.

42. He wol preise hit fast
And swere as he were wod,*
For the kyng of Ynglond
The drynk is swet and god,
And gif the gode-man to drynke
A gode quantité,
And make hym wers than he was,

* Pay the fee.

† *I.e.*, to impose upon her. See examples in *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 185. ‡ *I.e.*, to buy spicery with.

§ Brimful. ‖ Chest. ¶ See Richardson. * Mad.

Evel mot he the*
The clerk;
That so beryth awey that selver
And falselich dothe hys werk.

43. He wol byd the wif sethe a caponn
And a pese of bef;
The gode-man schal have never a mossel,†
Be he never so lef.‡
He wol pike hit hymself
And make his mawe towt,
And ȝif the gode-man to drynk
Lene broth that is nowȝt
For the sek:
That so bygileth the gode-man
Godds cors on hys cheke.

44. He maketh hym al nyȝt at ese
As wel as he can,
And loke that ha fare wel
Hors and eke man:
A-morow he taketh the uryn
And waggeth in the sunne,
And seyth, "Dame, blessed be God!
Thi maystre is i-wonne
And lyketh:§
Thus he bereth awey that selver
And the gode-wyf biswyketh.‖

* Thrive. † Morsel. ‡ Desirous.
§ Thriveth. ‖ Cheateth.

45. Certes, and by my sowle,
This world is al beshrewed;
Muche thei fare with falsenes
Bothe lered and lewed.
Of the lewed men
Now speketh the pope,
Whether I lye or I segge soth
Now ȝhe it schul grope,
That sothe
Falsenes cometh to eche feire
And piccheth first his bothe.*

46. The pope gret wel al lewed men,
William, Richard and Ion,
And doth hem to understonde
That trewth is ther non;
And seyth that he wer worthi
To be hanged and drawe,
That hathe dryve trewth out of lond
Without proces of lawe:
Alas!
Certes whil treweth was in londe
A gode frend he was.

47. Treweth was over al redy
For pore men to speke,
And now go pore men al a-doun
God hem mot a-wreke!

* Booth.

Pryde and covetise
Gyveth over al jugement,
And turneth lawes up and doun
Therfor pore men be shent*
Al clene:
Ther is no rych man that dredeth God
The worth of a bene.†

48. Thei that weldeth al the world
In town and in feld,
Erles and barowns
And also knyts of shelde,
All thei be i-swore
To maynten holy cherch ry3t,
And therfor was kny3t i-maked
For holy cherch to fi3t
San3 fayl;
And thei beth the first men
That holy cherch wolle assaile.

49. Thei maketh werre and wrake
In lond ther‡ schuld be pees;
Thei schuld to the Holy Lond
To make ther a rees:§
Thei schuld into the Holy Lond
And preve ther her my3t,
And help to wreke Jhesum Crist,

* Confounded. † A proverbial saying for anything worthless. See *Halliwell's Dictionary*, in v. *Bean*. ‡ Where. § Onslaught.

And than were he a kny3t
With sheld:
Now be they lyons in the halle
And hares in the feld.

50. Knytes schuld were clothes
I-schape in dewe manere,
As his order wold aske
As wel as schuld a frere:
Now thei beth disgysed
So diverselych i-di3t,
That no man may knowe
A mynstrel from a kny3t
Wel ny:
So is mekenes falt a-down
And pride aryse an hye.

51. Thus is the order of kny3t
A-turned up and doun;
As wel wol a kny3t chide
As eny scold in a toun;
Thei schuld be as hend*
As any lady in londe,
To speke al maner of fylth
Ne nys ne kny3t fonde†
For shame;
Thus is chyualrye a-cloyed‡
And woxen fote-lame.

* Gentle; polished. † See *Halliwell's Dictionary*, under *wonde*, which is probably the true reading. ‡ Debased.

52. Chyvalrye now is a-cloyed
And wyckedlych i-diȝt;
Conne a boye breke a spere
He schal be made a knyȝt.
Thus beth knyȝtis i-gadered
Of unkynde* blod,
And thei shendeth† the order
That schuld be hende and god,
And hende:
On shrew in a court
May al a company shende.

53. Knyȝts to drawe, God almyȝt
Iche tyme schal be swore,
His yen, his fat, his nayles,
His sowle is nowt forbore:
That is now the gentry‡
In chawmbre and eke in halle,
The lord wil hab on othe
Grettest of hem alle
For pride:
At the day of dom
Ne schal no man his othes hyde.

54. Now is non mysprowd squier
In al this mydil-ȝerd,§
Bot he bere a long babel‖ abowt

* Unaristocratic. See note [e].
† Corrupt.
‡ La mode.
§ Earth.
‖ Bauble. See *Halliwell's Dictionary*, in v.

And a longe berd,
And swere by Godds sowle,
And often vowen to God,
"I byshrew hym for that, perdou,*
Bothe hosed and shod,
For his werke:"
For such othes God is wroth
With lewed men and clerke.

55. Godds sowle schal be swore,
The knyf schal stond a-strout,†
Thow his botes be al-to-tore
ȝat he wol make it stout:
His hod schal hang on his brest
Riȝt as a draveled lowt,
Alas! the sowle worthe‡ forlore
For the body that is so prowd
In felle;§
Forsothe he is deseyved
He wenyth he dothe ful well.

56. A new entaile‖ thei have i-fend
That is now in eche toun;
The ray¶ is turned overthwart
That was wont be up and doun;
Thei beth desgysed as turmentours
I-come fro clerks pleye,

* Par Dieu! † Shall stick up. See a long account of this word in *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 102. ‡ Is. § Skin?
‖ Cut, or fashion. ¶ *Stripe* in the cloth.

Thei beth beleved al with pryde*
And have cast norter† away
In a diche:
Thei beth so desgised
Thei beth no man lych.

57. Mynystres under the king
That schuld meynten ry3t,
Of the fair clere day
Thei maken darke ny3t:
Thei goth out of the hy-way,
Thei letten‡ for no sclandre,
Thei maketh the mote-hall§
At home in here chawmbre
With wrong;
That schal pore men a-bygge‖
Ever more among.

58. When the kyng into his werre
Wol have stronge men,
Of ech toun to help hym at his werre
Fourten or ten:
The stronge schul sytte a-doun
For x. shylynge other twelve
And send wreches to the kyng
That mow not help hemselve
At nede:

* *I.e.*, are abandoned to pride. † Nurture.
‡ Leave off. § Justice-hall. ‖ Abide.

Thus is the kyng deseyved
And pore men shend for mede.*

59. Whan the kyng into his werre
Wol have a taxacion
To help hym at his nede
Of ech toun a portion:
Hit schal be to-tolled,†
Hit schal be to-twyȝt,‡
Hit schal half-del§ be go
Into the develes fliȝt
Of helle:
Ther beth so many parteners
Ne dar no pore mon telle.‖

60. A man that hath an hundred pownd
Schal pay xij.pens round:
And so mych schal a pore man pay
That poverte hath browt to ground,
That hath an housful of chyldre
Sitting abowt the flete:¶
Cristis cors hab thei!
But* that be wel sette
And sworn,
The pore schal be i-pylt†
And the rych schal be forborn.

* Destroyed by bribery. † Levied in full, or divided out.
‡ Snatched away. § One-half. ‖ Give information.
¶ Floor. * Unless. † Robbed. (A. S.)

61. Wyst the kyng of Ynglond
For god* he wold be wroth,
How his pore men be i-pyled
And how the selver goth:
Hit is so to-tolled
Bothe heder and theder,
Hit is halfen-del i-stole
Ar hit be brout togeder
And a-counted:
If a pore man speke a word
He shal be foul a-frounted.†

62. Wold the kyng do after me
That wold tech hym a skyl,‡
That he ne schul never habbe wylle
Pore men to pil:
He ne schuld not seke his tresor so fer,
He schuld fynd it ner,
At justices and at shiryves,
Corowners, and chancelers
No lesse:
This myȝt fynd hym i-now
And let the pore have pes.

63. Who that is in such offys
Ne come he ner§ so pore,
He fareth witin a while
As he had selver in horde:‖

* Doubtless. † Rebuked.
‡ A reasonable plan. § Never. ‖ Treasure. (A. S.)
Cf. *Halliwell's Dictionary*, in V.

Thei byen londs and ledes*
Ne may ther nowt astonde.†
Wat shul pore men be i-pild
Wil‡ such be in londe
Ful fele?§
Thei pleyeth wit the kyngs selver
And bredeth wode‖ for wele.

64. Sotelych¶ for-sothe
Thei don the kyngs hest;
Whan ech man hath his parte
The kyngs hath the lest;
Eche man is abowt
To fille his own pors,
The kyng hath the lest
And he hath al the cors
Wit wrong:
God send trewth into Ynglond!
Trechery dureth to long.

65. Thei byggeth wit the kyngs selver
Bothe londes and ledes,
Hors as fair as the kyngs
Save grete stedes;
This myȝt help the kyng
And have hemself inow:

* Landed possessions. † Withstand. ‡ While.
§ Many. ‖ Become mad (through prosperity).
¶ With subtlety.

Thei take thus wit a pore man,
That hath but half, I trowe,
A plow-land,
Other of a wreched laborer
That lyveth by hys hond.

66. Baylys and southbailys*
Under the shireves
Ever thei fondeth† wer
Thei mow pore men to-greve:
The pore men shul to London
To somons and to syse,
The rych wol sytte at home,
Were‡ selver wol aryse
Anon:
Crist cors mut thei have!
But§ that be wel i-don.

67. Courteous‖ in the benche
That stondeth at the barre
Wol bygile the in thin hond
Bot if¶ thu bewar:
He wol take half a mark
And do doun his hood,
And speke a word for a pore man—
And do hym lytil god,
I trowe:
Whan the gode-man gothe awey
He maketh hym a mowe.

* Sub-bailiffs. † Seek. ‡ Wher
§ Unless. ‖ Advocates. ¶ Unles

68. Attorneis in contré
Wynneth selfre for nowt;
Thei make men to bigynne ple*
That never had it thowȝt:
Wan thei cometh to the ryng
Hoppe† if thei con;
All that thei wynne wit falsenes
All that thei tell i-wonne
Ful wel;
Ne tryst no man to much to hem,
Thei beth fals by skyl.

69. Suche bethe men of this world,
Fals in the bille.
If eny man wolleth lyf
In trewth and in skil,
Let‡ his fals neyȝbours
And sewe§ not the rowte,‖
He may ech day of his lyf
Have grete dowte¶;
For why?
Thei schal al day be endited
For manslauȝt and robbery.

70. Take the trewest man
That ever in londe was,

* Law-suit.

‡ Dance; *i.e.*, they can *not* dance.

§ *I.e.*, if he leave.

‖ Follow.

¶ Crowd.

He schal be endited
For thing that never was;
I-take and i-bounde
A strong thef as he were,
And led to the kyngs prison
And lote hym lygge there
And rote;
Other wit a fals enquest,
Hang hym by the throte.

71. Many of thes assisours,
That seweth shyre and hundred,
Hangeth men for selver;
Therof is non wonder,
For wan the rich justice
Wol do wrong for mede
Than thynketh hem thei mow the beter
For thei have mor nede
For to wyn;
Thus hath covetise benome* hem,
Trowth for love of dedly syn.

72. Be seynt Jame in Gal,†
That many man hath sowt,
The pelery and the cok-stol‡
Be i-made for nouȝt:
Wan thei have al i-reyned§
And i-cast on hepe,

* Possessed.
† See note f.
‡ Cucking-stool.
§ Ruined?

Bred and ale is the derrer,
And never the better schepe
For al that:
Trechery is i-meyntend
And trewth is al-to-sqwat.*

3. Somtyme wer marchants
That trewly bout and sold,
Now is thilk assise† i-broke
And trewth is nowȝt of told:‡
Marchandis was wont
Be hold up with trewth,
Now it is turned to trechery
And that is grete rewth
To wete,
How trechery shal be hald up,
And trewth doun i-smete.

4. Ther nys wel ny no man
That can any craft,
That he nis a party
Lose in the haft:§
Falsnes is over
Al the world i-sprong
That nys wel ny no trewth
In hond ne in tonge
Ne in hert;

* Quite prostrate. † The same rule. ‡ Accounted of.
§ The metaphor is borrowed from some manual implement of repair: "in some degree loose in the haft."

Forsothe thei nyl sese*
Ar† God make hem to smert.

75. Ther was a game in Ynglond
That dured ȝer and other,‡
Even upon the Moneday
Ech man beshrewed other.
So long dured the game
Among lered and lewed,
That thei nold§ never beleve‖
Ar the world wer beschrewed,
I-wis:
Al that ever schal help man
All it fareth amys.

76. For the mych falsenes
That walketh in lond,
God almyȝty of heven
Hath bound nowt his bond,¶
And send wederyng on erthe,
Cold and unkynde,*
And ȝet is ther non man
That to God taketh mynde
With ryȝte;
We be nothing aferd
Of Hys myche myȝt.

* Will not cease. † Till. ‡ *I.e.*, two years.
§ Would not. ‖ Leave off.
¶ Has abrogated his covenant. * Unseasonable.

77. God is wroth with the world
And that is wel i-sene,
Al that was play and game
Is turned to sorow and tene;
God shewed us plenté inow,
Suffre whil we wold,
Al maner of frute
Groweng on molde
Ful thik,
And ever aȝens God Almyȝty
We beth alych wyk.*

78. Whan God Almyȝty seth
The work is overthwart,†
He sende his sond‡ into erthe
And makethe us to smart;
Whan bestes beth i-storve
And corne waxeth dere,
And honger and pestilence in ech lond
As ȝe mow ofte here
Over al;—
But if§ we amende us
It wil wel wers befal.

EXPLICIT.

* Equally wicked.
† Perverse; wrong. *Halliwell's Dictionary*, p. 595.
‡ Message. § Unless.

NOTES.

[a] The words included between brackets have been almost entirely erased; probably in obedience to the proclamation of Henry VIII, who after declaring "Thomas, sometime archbishop of Canterbury, to have been guilty of contumacy, treason, and rebellion," commanded "his loving subjects to destroy all images and pictures of the pseudo-saint Thomas, and to erase his name and remembrance from all books, under pain of his majesty's indignation."

[b] For a fuller delineation of a monastic gourmand, see *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, vol. i, p. 250, ed. Wright.

[c] The Minors were the gray friars, or Franciscans; the Jacobins, the black, or preaching friars, and were so called from their first establishment in Paris (see Fleury, *Hist. Eccl.*, liv. lxxviii, s. 5); the Carmes, or Carmelites, were the white friars, originally established at Mount Carmel; the Austins were friars of the order of St. Augustine. They had all gained a footing in England about the year 1250. In the "Creed of Piers Ploughman" they are satirized at length.

[d] Cf. Piers *Ploughman's Vision*, vol. i, p. 133:

> "For murthereris are many leches
> Lord hem amende!
> They do men deye through hir drynkes
> Er destynee it wolde."

Sentiments not unlike the above had been uttered long before, by John of Salisbury.

[e] Allusion is perhaps made to royal edicts and decisions of Parliament, whereby it was ordained that all persons who had a whole knight's fee, or fifty pounds a-year in land, should be admitted to the honour of knighthood. Instances of this practice occurred in the years 1312 and 1316. See *Carte*, ii, 325, 339.

[f] The reference is to St. James of Compostella in *Galicia*, which was then a most famous resort of pilgrims:

> "And til seint James be sought
> There I shal assigne,
> That no man go to Galis
> But if he go for evere."
> *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, vol. i, p. 72.

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PRINTED FOR THE PERCY SOCIETY,
BY RICHARDS, ST. MARTIN'S LANE.

M.DCCC.XLVIII.

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